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SIPDIS

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FOR NEA/ARPI, EUR/NB, AND EB

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [MU](#) [DA](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN SWEPT BY DENMARK BOYCOTT FERVOR

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Prompted by the flap over cartoons in Denmark deemed offensive to Islam, Omani consumers are boycotting Danish products with increasing fervor, and grocers are taking note by pulling suspected goods from shelves. Some companies have taken out advertisements to remind consumers that they are not Danish. While the Grand Mufti supports boycott calls, the government is largely staying out of the fray. End Summary.

CALL TO BOYCOTT

¶2. (U) While the Omani government remained silent regarding the caricature of the prophet Mohammed published in a Danish newspaper, local Omani Internet message board "al-Sablah" provided a ready stage for heated and prolonged discussion among participants, most calling for family, friends, and fellow Muslims to boycott Danish products. Random mobile phone text messages calling for the boycott of Danish products are also proliferating.

¶3. (U) Shaykh Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili, Grand Mufti of Oman, urged the Muslim community to unite against Western attacks on Islam. He pronounced, "Whoever blasphemes against any of the prophets maligns Islam if he is a Muslim. And if he is a non-Muslim in treaty with Muslims, the treaty is deemed terminated." Regarding Arab calls for boycott, the Grand Mufti suggested even further action. "The trade boycott is the least Muslims should do against the blasphemy of the perpetrators to protect the sanctity of the religion, sacred places, and the position of the Prophet." Various imams also spoke to this issue during their prayer calls and there is isolated talk of holding public demonstrations.

IT WASN'T ME...

¶4. (U) Omani grocers have responded to consumer anger by pulling suspected Danish products from their shelves. Even large international supermarkets, such as Lulu's (a division of Abu Dhabi-based Emke Group), have removed Danish products to show solidarity with (or avoid backlash from) consumers who support the boycott. Furthermore, some clients of Nawras, Oman's second largest wireless provider, have been returning their telephones in protest of the company's Danish connections (Denmark-based TDC is a minority stakeholder). In response, some European companies, such as Swiss-based Nestle, have posted front page advertisements in local papers to address consumer misperceptions that they are Danish.

GOVERNMENT MUM

¶5. (SBU) Apart from the Grand Mufti (Oman's top religious leader, appointed by the Sultan), the Omani government has kept silent on the cartoon-boycott issue. As with anything that complicates trade relations or stirs religious passions, this is a phenomenon the government was clearly hoping would blow over but seems, if anything, to still be gathering steam. Of likely further discomfort is the fact that Denmark's honorary consul in Oman is Anwar bin Ali Sultan - the brother of the Minister of Commerce and Industry, and head of one of Oman's oldest and biggest companies, WJ Towell. BALTIMORE